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In virtually all phases of our national life we are accepting new viewpoints that are reflected in student attitudes. Students are flocking to urban universities and demanding curricula that are related to peace, social justice, and domestic and world problems. A growing number of skeptical, moderate students are joining the hard-core destructive radicals to participate in student protest activities. Young faculty members have joined with the moderate student group to challenge the wisdom of decisions made by authoritative personnel and to demand participation in decision-making processes. Black students are demanding more information about black people in the US. All of these demands are new, controversial, and potentially constructive. University response should not constitute a paternalistic defense of or apology for past institutional philosophies but the creation of innovative programs to attack major problems and improve the "human experience." The range of skills and resources found at the university has always made it the natural place for solving wartime, medical, and scientific problems. Now it is confronted with social, legal, political, economic, psychological and educational problems which again provide it with an opportunity to contribute to national progress. It should, through analysis, criticism, and experimentation, formulate new concepts and ways to overcome the inequities and dislocations of our society. (WM)

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PRESSURES ON THE URBAN UNIVERSITY TODAY

An Address
by
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Annual Dinner Meeting
of the
New York Group
Investment Bankers Association of America

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PRESSURES ON THE URBAN UNIVERSITY TODAY

The urban university in America is in the most dynamic phase of its history. Until now, to most Americans, the urban university, while obviously well-placed for professional studies, has seemed in many respects a second best form of higher education. This country's traditional anti-urban prejudices were institutionalized in our classic concepts of what the environment of the ideal college or the ideal university ought to be. The ideal college was the New England model -- small, far-removed from the contamination and temptations of the city, limited to a more or less homogeneous student body. The ideal university for most Americans was patterned after the great mid-western state universities -- spacious, carefree, and usually far

from the distractions of the urban scene. Of course I am exaggerating. We know many notable institutions that do not follow either of these patterns. But it cannot be denied that, until the present, certainly the typical privileged American family contemplating college for a son or daughter has thought most favorably of the campus that is disengaged from urban America.

This is still the case --among parents. Most of them still prefer a collegiate experience that will protect their children from the city rather than expose them to the great problems and cultural manifestations of modern America. In many cases, they are right. The urban scene is not the appropriate place for immature youngsters who have been brought up under sheltered conditions and who lack the personal discipline for

productive life in the city. The urban university, however, provides exactly the right conditions for a growing number of young people who do not find the traditional collegiate environment relevant to their mood.

We Americans are fortunate that there are such young people today. We hear about the large number of drop-outs and freak-outs, and we have reason to be concerned about whether there are enough young Americans prepared by disposition, ambition, knowledge, and ability to confront the enormous demands our future holds. Those who are on the firing line, the teaching faculty, will tell you that there are in fact more young people today who want to do something personally to improve the conditions of our world than we have ever seen before. Young people of this type today are often attracted to

higher education in the city, and it is they who are giving the urban university its greatest opportunity for development. For increasing numbers of students, the urban university is their first choice. Many choose the urban university despite their parents' preferences and fears. Many students transfer to the urban university after a year or more at a traditional campus. It may astonish you to learn that New York University each year admits as many transfer students -- in good standing -- as freshmen.

The kind of students I am describing, students who are willing to forsake the beauties of nature, the warm campus feeling, the exclusive academic world set apart, where songs and laughter are not drowned out, as they are in New York, by the rumble of traffic and the shrieking of sirens -- such young people are deeply affected by the

current mood among college students everywhere -- a mood that demands a curriculum more relevant to their concerns with peace and social justice; a mood that demands a voice in planning the curriculum. Such students want their university to be an agency for overcoming the evils they perceive in the world, and they want a voice in determining the policies by which their university is governed. Pressures on the urban university from students who have chosen it because of its logical relevance to the crucial problems of modern America are growing daily. Such pressures have already manifested themselves in many ways, and they are building vigorously at this moment.

Activism is not limited to students. The young faculty members who choose the urban university today often have the same concerns and dedication as the students I have

described. They tend to be far more involved with students than older colleagues are. They are more specifically interested in the urban scene than the older faculty. The young faculty members want to provide an educational experience more closely tied to domestic and world problems. They too want a greater voice in determining the policies of the university.

In part, the demands of students and faculty members reflect the world-wide reaction to the impersonal mass-produced quality of modern civilization. Increasingly we hear the claim by those who are affected by large institutions to have a voice in determining their policies. In the urban university, this claim is advanced not only by students and members of the faculty, but also by neighbors, by community organizations, by legislators, and by others.

Many of those who assert this claim regard as antiquated the legal provisions of a private university's charter. To the activist mind, the fact that our Board of Trustees is legally entrusted the property and privileges of operating an educational institution is more an affront than an acceptable fact. What is considered relevant is what is called the social reality, not the legal authority.

A decade ago the reaction of most trustees and presidents to assertions of this kind was a forceful statement of the rights and responsibilities of a private institution to do as it sees fit. While faculty control over the curriculum, and, in many cases, student discipline, was delegated by most boards of trustees long before, the power of the trustees to set university policy in other areas and to control the institution financially was

unquestioned. Ten years ago authoritarian answers to radical questions were frequently given with confidence. Now, however, authoritarian answers, which often provide emotional release when contemplated, somehow sound inappropriate when delivered.

Surely this is one of the significant changes of recent times. A decade ago we laughed at stories about high-handed autocrats. Today such laughter has a hollow ring. Perhaps it was memories of Victorian grandfathers or the common military experiences imposed by two world wars that gave us tolerance for authoritarian personalities. To the young people of today, however, and to those close to them attitudinally, authoritarianism is an anathema. For this reason, even those among young radicals whose attacks on the establishment are most

reminiscent of the Communist line refuse to accept the discipline of the Party.

Anyone undertaking to deal with students today must recognize that a large proportion of them are simply unwilling to accept the dictates of authorities without challenge or question. Anti-authoritarianism is not limited to the hard-core radicals who are bent on confrontations. Anti-authoritarianism is strong and deep among a much larger number of young people who do not subscribe to any destructive philosophy. It is with the attitudes and interests of these students, the increasingly large number of questioning, skeptical, highly idealistic and moralistic, anti-authoritarian moderates that we must be most deeply concerned. We can never expect to satisfy the hard-core, destructive radicals. We will not reach

the moderates, however, with authoritarian, legalistic responses. They simply do not believe that trustees, administrators, or members of the faculty automatically possess superior wisdom or absolute rights. They believe that we, like adults with many other responsibilities, can and do make mistakes, can and do fail to appreciate the revulsion that many young people feel for the crassness of much of our civilization and for deplorable conditions we have allowed to exist. They want a voice in changing those conditions, and since their present center of interest and activity is the university, they want to participate in the decision-making process there.

The appropriate response to this demand (which is the current word for an insistent request) is perhaps the most difficult question faculty members, administrators,

and trustees now face. At least half of the time of our staff meetings this summer and fall has been devoted to this question. In some institutions it may be possible to declare that admission is a privilege and not a right, that trustees, administrators, and faculty members are in charge, and that those who challenge this authority can stay away. But to the kind of students and faculty members who have chosen New York University today, such a response would provoke a profoundly negative reaction.

In all of this, however, theory has gotten far ahead of practice. It is possible that the expressed eagerness to take part in university governance is only a passing fancy. In that case, fundamental restructuring of the university could result in making it vulnerable to the influence of irresponsible or destructive minorities.

This is a deeply troubling problem. Some believe the end of the Vietnam War would terminate student and faculty activism. I believe concern for our domestic problems alone will keep constructive activism alive for years to come. I hope it does.

The process of self-examination and institutional adjustment to student and faculty pressures is causing concern among many outside observers. They fear we are bowing to threats of violence from radical minorities who want to destroy our society and who are using the university as an instrument of destruction. They see in student protests against the war, efforts to avoid the draft, the resort to violence and lawlessness in demonstrations, plus the highly-publicized changes in sexual behavior and the use of drugs by some students, a pattern of disintegration of the

standards and values of American life that the colleges and universities should be upholding. College administrators who do not apply immediate and severe penalties for what appear to be serious violations of accepted standards of behavior are described as lacking courage. A recent newspaper cartoon depicted a strap-on backbone for spineless college administrators.

My response to such observers is to point out that the university is reflecting forces at work in society at large. The Vietnam War is a seriously divisive national issue whose effects are not limited to the youth. Such a controversial issue is bound to have serious effects among those who are subject to the draft. Of course dedicated agitators have seized upon this powerful issue to involve many students in forms of protest they would not otherwise

join. The widespread dissatisfaction with the adult world stimulated by the Vietnam War is certainly a major force in all phases of student unrest today, but it is not the only force. The civil rights issue had aroused student activists long before the Vietnam War became so widely criticized.

With regard to student behavior in other respects and the ability of college administrators to affect such behavior, we must recognize that in virtually all phases of our national life we are accepting new viewpoints which are inevitably reflected in student attitudes. The Puritan code that has typified our official standards is being exchanged almost everywhere for a code that is considered to be more consistent with actual adult

behavior. Critics of American society, including the young of many generations, have long attacked the hypocrisy inherent in the gap between public standards and private behavior, and many Americans welcome the new era of frankness, openness, and lack of pretense. In such an environment, it would be virtually impossible for colleges and universities to apply the standards of another era. Therefore, increasingly, students are given the authority to determine, democratically, the rules by which their residences are governed. The vast majority of students want rules that provide for a wholesome environment. But they also want to be free from what they consider to be arbitrary rules set by adults intent on imposing a facade of Puritan respectability.

It is true that in the past the characteristic attitude of our colleges and universities toward students

has been paternalistic and that the typical structure of institutional governance has been authoritarian. By and large, until now, these characteristics have not been seriously challenged by substantial numbers of faculty members and students. Faculty members have been more intent on their personal professional interests and students have not been inclined to give much time, thought, and energy to matters outside their course work and extracurricular activities. Now what is in many ways an anachronistic structure is under attack, and we are not on solid ground if our response is simply to defend it. Neither we nor the students find paternalism a suitable institutional philosophy in today's environment.

Therefore we are engaged in serious study of our philosophies, our methods of organization, and our

processes of decision-making. No college or university would claim that it has achieved a final working solution. We are not seeking to shirk fundamental responsibilities or to make changes to gain peace. Let me emphasize again: it is not the radical few to whom we seek to make a response. No one can deny that they have helped to raise important issues. But it is the larger number of moderate and constructive students with whom not only we in higher education but also all of us in America must be concerned. A nation cannot advance if its best young men and women lack enthusiasm for its purposes, practices, and institutions. We are in serious trouble in this regard now. Neither our universities nor business nor the government is valued by youth as they were by our generation. It is our job in the universities to seek to bridge the generation gap and to

form common ground for working together toward a better world. That is why we must be prepared to listen, to think, and to respond, and not simply to defend the philosophies and practices of the past.

Another source of pressure on the university is what can be called the black revolution. The attempt in predominantly white institutions to increase opportunities for black students has been building slowly for the past five years but got its great impetus from the effect that Martin Luther King's murder had on our national conscience. In colleges and universities throughout the country that moment of tragedy stimulated a determination to effect major advances in opportunities for black people quickly. At New York University we raised a substantial special scholarship fund, and this fall four hundred more black students in

various categories entered the University than would have been able to enter otherwise. We want to continue this recruitment, and we will continue to need generous financial assistance to make it possible.

The black revolution is having other repercussions throughout American colleges and universities. There is a popular demand from both black and white students for more information about black people in America and more discussion of means to improve their position. There are various experiments designed to give black students a greater feeling of identity and pride. In the city, there is an effort to include members of the larger black community in university programs. All this is quite new, quite controversial, and, I believe, potentially quite constructive. It is demanding of us a willingness to experiment and to absorb criticism

which has helped to turn what was considered a quiet profession into a continuous encounter with crises.

Our national desire to solve urban problems has brought new opportunities and new pressures to the urban university. No other institution in the city possesses the range of resources the university commands. No other institution is such a natural agency to which to turn when the community needs skilled talent. The nation turned to the universities in wartime and obtained solutions to many problems. The nation has turned to the universities to solve scientific and medical problems, and they have responded willingly and successfully. Now the nation is turning particularly to the urban universities to help solve social, legal, political, economic, psychological, and educational problems of fantastic complexity. This is

a pressure that calls for a response we are only beginning to formulate. Institutions like New York University have long served the city by educating its youth, preparing for its professions, providing extensive medical and other services, and by providing all manner of special educational programs. What is asked now is that we go beyond teaching and the largely individual research projects that have typified university practice to create large-scale interdisciplinary programs to solve major social and physical problems. This is difficult because it involves organizing highly individualistic faculty members into teams requiring substantial financial support, but we are deeply involved in such programs in health, law, social welfare, engineering, business, and finance.

These are some of the pressures that are providing the urban university the impetus for its greatest historical development. Students, faculty members, black citizens, and the agencies of society are turning to the urban university with new and demanding expectations. It would be our highest service to find ways through which we can overcome the inequities and dislocations of our society. The university should be a place of analysis, criticism, experimentation, and a place from which new concepts of human experience emerge. The university in the city should make a special contribution to the solution of the urban problems that threaten our nation.

While it is a basic function of the university to preserve and pass on the contributions of the past, it should not be the role of the university to defend the status

quo. The proper environment of the university is a questioning, challenging environment. If it is paternalistic, defensive, or apologetic, then the university shall not only fail to perform its vital function in improving human experience, it shall also fail the potential leaders of the future whom it is our task to inspire.